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Role-playing technique of instruction in general ethnology class at Wheaton College. Students take turns acting as players, ethnographers, and critics. Purpose is to encourage student participation in learning process and increase identification with what is learned.

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Perspective by Participation

When Wheaton College had a fall retreat for its faculty, an anthropology professor contributed to a symposium, "Focus on Better Teaching." The following article is taken from it. He tells us how (in a course that has since grown into two sections of fifty students each) a larger degree of student participation leads to increased learning. He is a graduate of Wheaton (Illinois), of Pennsylvania (M.A.), and a doctoral candidate at Columbia University where he is studying under a Danforth Foundation Teachers' Study Grant.

By JAMES O. BUSWELL III

CANTOR POINTS OUT that "The student cannot assimilate knowledge-symbols unless he is able to locate in his own experience the reality to which the symbol refers."[1] This is identification. Knowledge leads to learning when it becomes integrated with one's own concerns; when it can be made to involve the person and his life to such an extent that he will release his tight emotional grip upon the attitudes formerly or perhaps even yet held dear, and pursue more knowledge, now motivated by a new concern for understanding in terms of one's whole system of values with which the knowledge is now dynamically identified. This is the beginning of participation.

The fruits of such learning are the rewards of good teaching.

One day, over coffee in the Student Union, a colleague of mine indicated a group of students in one of the booths concerned together over some reading matter. "Wouldn't it be something," he observed, "if they got that excited over something in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* or the *American Anthropologist!*" But what would a peek over the shoulders reveal? *Life* magazine, most likely, or *Sports Illustrated,* or perhaps even the latest profundity from Pogo.

The intellectual atmosphere on our campus should foster individual and group interest and concern for the contents of professional journals. This would be participation. And it can be fostered by teaching methods which involve literal or more conscious participation, as well as those which have chiefly intellectual participation as a goal. This is a distinct necessity in the effort to overcome the current failure to change basic attitudes and values during the college career. For, as Cantor, as well as others, has pointed out, "knowledge gained through direct participation in translating ideas into personal significance modifies one's system of attitudes."[2]

I would like to illustrate this by reporting a method of teaching which is intended to bring about possibly a greater degree of student participation in his learning process, and increased identification with what is learned, in a course which lends itself perhaps better than some to this type of teaching.

In the general ethnology class for the past five years we have been conducting a role playing technique of instruction[3] in order to increase the students' facility for looking through the eyes of another culture. In the first week of the semester the class is divided into three "tribes." Each member is expected to become as familiar with the culture of his assigned tribe as the literature allows. A little later on each student is assigned a particular role in his tribe. One will be a fisherman's wife, one a chief executioner in a king's court, one a medicine man, or a chief, or a child, or a grandmother. Each student is required now to become intimately familiar not only with the culture itself, but with his own particular relationship to the society.

This preparation in the literature on the tribe, and familiarization with tribal roles is carried on in addition to the regular assignments and course of instruction for the first twelve weeks. The first six weeks is spent chiefly in geographical and world cultural orientation. The second six weeks is devoted to the study of about a dozen different societies in as much detail as possible, as well as the study of field research methods.

In the final six weeks of the semester, the role playing is conducted in the following manner: Tribe number 1 assembles before the class in whatever situation the members may devise. Sometimes an episode of about five minutes will be acted out; sometimes the members will simply be occupied with different tasks or in quiet conversation. Tribe number 2, not in tribal role at this time, approaches the role playing tribe as ethnographers. It is the responsibility of the eth-

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nographers to make initial contact, subsequent inquiry, and continued interview for three consecutive class periods. Initially only one or two ethnographers approach, while the others listen and observe. Later on they may break up and interviewing may continue in small groups.

At the end of a week the ethnographers write up their description of the culture which they have been examining, and present it at the next meeting of the class. At this time the tribe under observation has the opportunity of correcting mistaken impressions, explaining points which were misinterpreted or overlooked. Then group number 3, which has been observing all week, presents a critique, first of the ethnographers, and then of the role players.

Subsequently the turns at role playing are rotated until each tribe has acted as players, ethnographers, and critics.

The values of this classroom method can be many and far reaching. Each student, when his tribe is being investigated, must act totally in terms of the culture of that tribe. This includes not only the manners, the etiquette, and superficial customs, but the value system as well. In addition, each tribal group is set up to involve kinship relationships between members which are invariably *vastly* different from the relationships of our own kinship system. These not only demand an understanding of intricate and reciprocally consistent relationships with each member of the group, but reciprocally consistent behavior patterns between each relative, prescribed by their particular relationship. Thus, not only are the responses to the presence and questions of the ethnographer to be in terms of the culture, but all interaction with other members of the tribe must be consistent at all times.

It can readily be seen that each student is forced to objectify his own culture to such a degree that he can identify himself with the new culture. This enforced empathy allows the student to grasp the foreign culture's own self-consistency, its own system of logic, its own interrelated behavior patterns based upon its own system of values.

Similarly, the ethnographic role forces the inquirer to probe, not in terms of his own cultural perspective, but to seek identification with that of his informant.

What does all this accomplish for the student in the long run? Obviously he learns to understand that people are different and that their differences do not necessarily make them bad, nor inferior, nor to be evaluated in any sense by our own culture.

The student learns, as well, some of the important problems of cross-cultural communication. Since everything is conducted in English, the purely nonlinguistic barriers to effective communication are highlighted, and a profoundly new aspect of the problems of foreign contacts is brought inevitably into focus.

This matter of communication, and the enforced position of being identified with a foreign viewpoint, carries with it important implications for study in other areas, chiefly in philosophy and the social sciences. The very fact of having to reintegrate oneself in terms of another set of behavior patterns and responses takes one out of one's own limited frame of reference and permits a reexamination of aspects of it which were previously taken completely for granted. The student recognizes his emotional attachments to certain attitudes and values. Once recognized, these attitudes and values are either reinforced with logic and reason, or else they are modified in terms of new, meaningful knowledge with which the student has now been able to identify himself.

In commenting on this final phase of the course, one student wrote: "I enjoyed this last six weeks very much mainly because of its practical application which applied not only in the classroom but in everyday life . . ." Another wrote, "Strange to say, I learned more when I took on the role of a tribeswoman than I did as an ethnographer."

Obviously all subjects cannot be taught with this same degree of overt, physical participation. Besides, the particular technique or method is not the important thing. Philip Jacob points out in *Changing Values in College*, that "on the whole, attitudes and value judgments are relatively unaffected by the manner in which students are taught. Some students may respond better to one method than another . . ."[4] Nevertheless there is always the possibility of the teacher so identifying himself with the student that he will anticipate with ever increasing facility just how his particular area of knowledge is most meaningful, just how it must be translated into the students' interests; hooked on, if you please, to his collegiate train of thought. Jacob again points out: "It is particularly important for a teacher to understand psychological factors underlying the conflict in value systems between a student and his educational pro-

gram. He can then facilitate the learning process by providing emotional support to the student, rather than trying directly to exact a response to values which the student doesn't and probably cannot recognize."[5] Perhaps this will have to be done, upon occasion, by the very withholding of such instruction as he has learned to expect so that he is compelled to make the identification for himself.

Once the identification is actually made, once the involvement of the student's mind and emotions with the subject in terms either of his interests on the one hand, or as a threat to them on the other, starts him thinking for himself, it would seem that the beginning of participation has been reached. Intellectual participation stimulated and kept alive by capable, challenging, crafty instruction soon culminates in the student's being taken over by self-motivated study.

(Parenthetically, the student thus motivated will find his way to the library more frequently, more regularly, and for other than social purposes. The achievement of students actually participating in a dynamic learning experience in the classroom will go a long way toward correcting many present problems in the library.)

Once such identification and participation have been achieved, other things being equal, it follows almost inevitably that standards will be raised and attitudes and values will be modified.

Without such modification as a *primary objective of good teaching,* we run the risk of supporting the trend of allowing the college trained individual to perpetuate through adulthood the standards with which he was emotionally identified as a high school graduate. The increase of knowledge without "know-how," of information without insight, of instruction without integration, only results in tastes determined by appeal instead of discrimination, judgments without the bases of evaluation, and decisions and choices in all areas of living without reference to authority in any of them. This will only serve to enlarge the present problem of the numbers of those who prefer their own version of what constitutes, for example, good decoration without consultation of the artist, good science without the scientist, good music without the musician, a good book without knowing good literature, a good speech without knowing good rhetoric, a good sermon without knowing Bible doctrine, a good leader without knowing good leadership, and a good business transaction without understanding honest business ethics.

We as teachers must insure that the education which we provide involves learning not only how to create, but the necessity of creativity; not only how to participate in life, but the essential value of participation; not only how to identify oneself with men and ideas, but the tragedy of the barren waste in the lives of those who are incapable of so doing.

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[5] *Ibid.,* p. 119.

Useful Education

"Few of us spend all our time or interest on the job of earning a living. We are husbands, wives, sweethearts, mothers or fathers, sons or daughters; we are members of a church, a fraternal order, a trade union, a political party; we go to movies, read newspapers, listen to the radio. We are citizens of our city, state, and nation; we are now in a real sense citizens of the world. When we speak of 'useful' education we need to ask whether it is useful in preparing us for these vocations, whether or not it will help us to participate more significantly and joyfully in the great society of which we are all members. If it prepares us for this it is vocational and useful—as surely as is that type of education which teaches us cost accounting or mechanics."

PETER ODEGARD